# A Brief History of The Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine

1884-1946

Second Revision

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## THE FOUNDATION OF THE COMMUNITY

In the spring of the year, 1881, a little group of devout Churchpeople in Toronto were discussing ways and means by which they could best express their gratitude to GOD for the blessings bestowed upon them in a Mission which had been held a few weeks before. Just at the same time a woman —who had been born in Canada, had lived in England, and had become a widow—was preparing to obey GOD'S call to devote the remainder of her life to His service. In the working out of the Divine purpose they met in Toronto in 1881. As a result of that meeting the human plans of all were changed and overruled.

Instead of bringing out members of an English Order to open a Branch House for some local work of charity, it was decided that a Community for women should be established in Canada. Instead of returning to England to enter the Community of Saint Mary the Virgin at Wantage, Mrs. Coome was to be trained in America to take charge of the new venture. The Sisters of Saint Mary, the first American Order, whose Mother House is at Peekskill, N.Y., very kindly consented to take her into their Novitiate and to prepare her for her future life. On the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, 1884, she was professed as a Sister of Saint John the Divine. Thus the first Canadian Religious Order in the Anglican Church came into being, with Sister Hannah as its Mother Foundress.

It is interesting to read the records which tell of the plans and preparations made during the three years from 1881 to 1884. After the first informal conferences, a Toronto priest, who was going to England, was commissioned to see some of the leaders of the Church in that country and to enlist their help in bringing "real Sisters" out to Canada. His mission was not altogether fruitless, although no English Order at that time had Sisters to spare for work so far away, for at least it directed the attention of a group of very influential men to the needs of Canada and aroused their sympathy which showed itself the next year in a practical way.

When the news came back that Sisters could not be secured from England, the little band of Churchpeople was disappointed but undaunted. In the autumn a small meeting was held in Mrs. F. D. Barwick's drawing room, when the Rev. O. P. Ford, Miss Grier, Mrs. MacLean Howard and Mrs. Broughall were present. It was decided to go on in faith and obedience to the call, and that Father Ford should draw up a circular telling what the

meeting had in mind, viz. a centre to help towards a deeper spiritual life and definite work of some kind.

In September, 1881, Miss Grier gave a garden party in the grounds of Bishop Strachan School. Mrs. Coome was then in Toronto to say goodbye to her mother before leaving for Wantage, and accepted her sister's invitation, little knowing how momentous a meeting was to take place that afternoon. For there she was introduced to Father Ford and Mrs. Broughall, who begged her to reconsider her decision and found a Canadian Community.

Now followed a time of grave thought and prayer. She put the matter before such friends and advisers as Canon Carter, Canon Brooke of St. John the Divine, Kennington, Father Hall, S.S.J.E., and others, and all agreed that she should accept this as her vocation, and that she should be trained in the United States rather than in England. By November she had signified her consent.

In the months of February and April following, two public meetings were held, one at St. Luke's, the other at St. George's. At the former, Mrs. Coome was asked to undertake to found the future Sisterhood with the promise that, during the two years of training for herself and others, the Committee for Collections, with Mrs. Broughall as its convenor, would endeavour to provide a house and endowment. The Rev. O. P. Ford was suggested as Warden. At the latter the Reverend Provost Whitaker, the Reverend John Langtry, the Reverend O. P. Ford, Dr. Playter and Mr. J. R. Cartwright spoke. The result was a unanimous decision approving the foundation of a Sisterhood in Toronto and appointing a large General Committee to secure funds. The long list of sixty-two names, printed elsewhere in the pamphlet, included many of the best known Churchpeople in this part of Canada at that time.

One of the conditions laid down by the Foundress when she gave her promise to take charge of the new Community had been that the Sisters were not to beg for their support; the money must be raised by others. Before the end of the year we find an influential English Committee—the names of the members, to be found on page 6 speak for themselves—sending out a circular letter in which they stated that £2,000 had been given in Canada towards an endowment, and they hoped that £1,500 of the balance of the £5,000 desired might come from England. This money was invested later in the building of the Convent on Major Street.

A campaign of education was also going on in Toronto. At the monthly meetings, held primarily for sewing and making the furnishings for the future house, books dealing with the history and principles of the Religious Life were being read; and larger public gatherings were being addressed by such men as Bishop Quintard of Tennessee, Bishop Seymour of Springfield, Father Hall, S.S.J.E. (later Bishop of Vermont), who had all had intimate personal knowledge of the life and work of Sisters. Such education was very necessary, not only because Sisters in the Anglican Communion were to most people a "novelty", but because there were strong barriers of prejudice as well as of ignorance, to be broken down.

While the Committees in Canada and in England were thus hard at work, there were two persons who were making still more intensive preparation—Mrs. Coome and Father Ford.

The Mother Foundress was living the ordinary life of a Novice in the Community of Saint Mary, and so well was the secret of her future destiny guarded by the Superiors there that few knew until the day of her profession that she was not entering that Order for life.

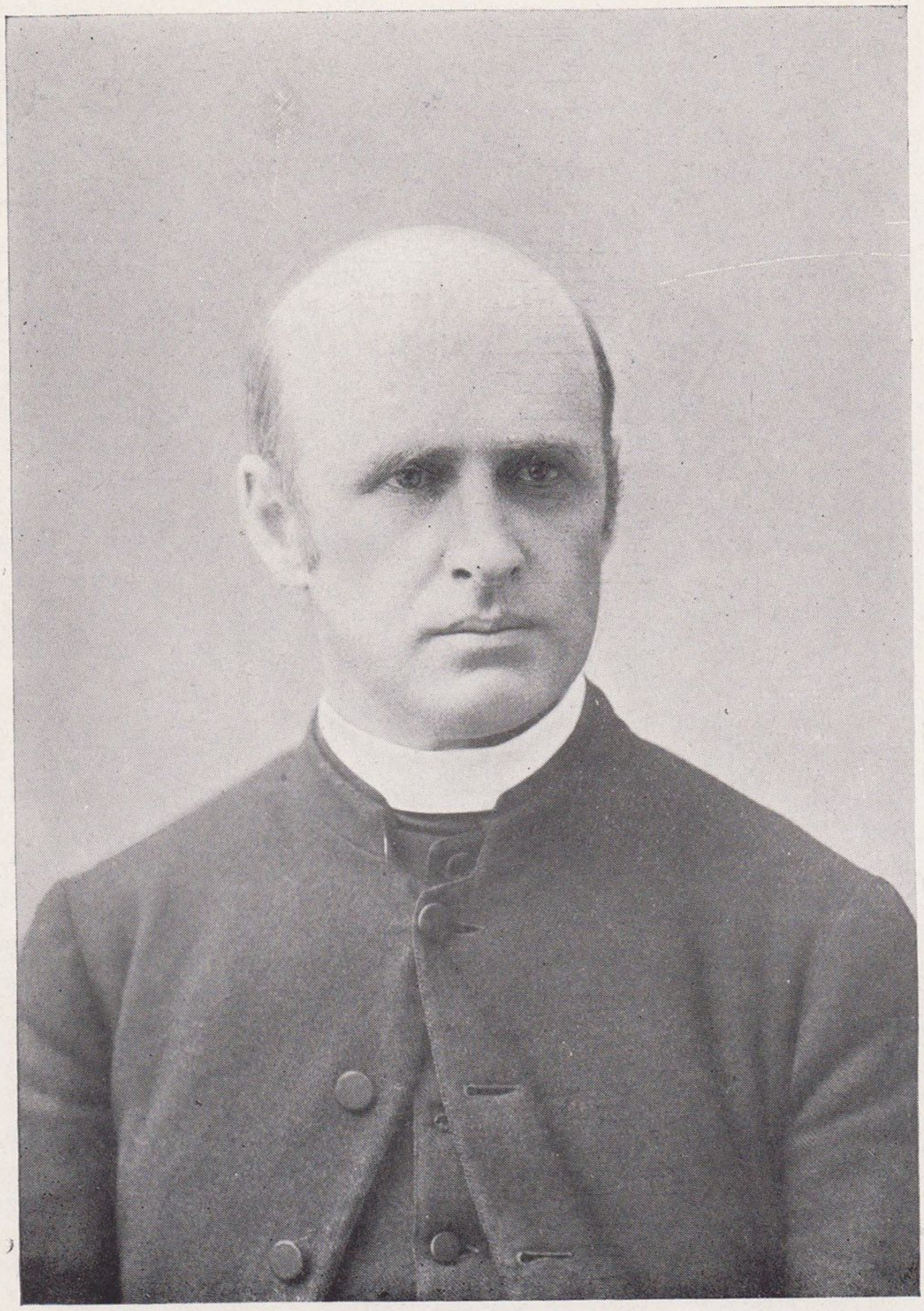
It is not possible in this historical sketch to write much concerning her great gifts and the power of her personality. These may be read in her biography. She had, however, while living in England, become thoroughly skilled in the arts of fine needlework and embroidery. She had also an unusual knowledge of architecture, which proved a valuable asset to the Community in later days. To these accomplishments she was now adding a practical knowledge of nursing in St. Mary's Hospital for Children; she was being brought into close association with the educational work and the operation of the House of Mercy, carried on by the American Community; and above all, she was receiving a thorough training in the fundamental principles of the Religious Life, which had been established so wisely and well at Peekskill under the influence of Mother Harriet, C.S.M., and Dr. Morgan Dix.

At last the great day of her profession came, September 8, 1884, the birthday of the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine. In the morning her vows were received by the Bishop of New York; the Bishop of Springfield, Dr. Houghton, Dr. Dix, Canon and Mrs. Broughall being also present at the service. In the evening she and a novice left for Toronto to take up the work to which her life was now pledged.

The first work of mercy undertaken by the Sisterhood was to watch with a child who died on Holy Cross Day. During the next three months the Sisters lived at Bishop Strachan School, as the Mother Foundress had asked to be allowed personally to select the house and furniture for the new Convent. Some delay was caused by the difficulty of finding a suitable building, but early in December they moved into a house on Robinson Street which had begun life as a stable and had been transformed into two small abodes for working men, surely fitting antecedents for the house of those who wished to follow the Master in His Poverty. On the Feast of St. John the Evangelist the house was formally opened and blessed by the Bishop of Toronto.

Amongst the many gifts of the Mother Foundress was her power of attracting other strong personalities to assist in her work. The Community owes much to such men as Canon Littledale, Canon Carter, Bishop Osborne, Bishop Hall, and Canon Brooke, who gave wise counsel; to the groups of friends in Canada who provided for its material needs; to its First Warden; and not least to the band of early Sisters—Sister Margaret, Sister Sarah, Sister Mary, Sister Eliza, and others, who have entered into their rest, but whose works live on imperishably.

THE MOTHER FOUNDRESS, S.S.J.D., 1885



THE REVEREND O. P. FORD, M.A.
FIRST WARDEN

It had been decided that the Reverend O. P. Ford should be the first Warden and Chaplain of the Community. The choice was natural and wise. He was a Canadian, born in Brockville, and had graduated from Trinity College, Toronto, in 1868, with First Class Honours in Classics and Mathematics. His spiritual and intellectual gifts were outstanding, and he had long been praying and quietly working for the establishment of Orders, both for men and women, in Canada. To fit himself for the direction of the new Sisterhood, he had gone to spend a year at Cowley in order that he might live in the atmosphere of the Religious Life and have the benefit of the advice of Father Benson regarding the future. Upon his return he attempted for two years to carry on the work of his old mission at Woodbridge, while paying frequent visits to Toronto to serve the Sisterhood and others who looked to him for help. This double duty proved to be too much, so in 1886 he resigned the mission in the country and became Assistant Priest in S. Luke's Parish, in order that he might devote the greater part of his time and strength to the building up of the Community. The time on earth was to be shorter than he knew, the strength to be less. During the following year he was taken ill, and on June 20th, 1888, after many months of suffering, he died. Humanly speaking, this seemed to be a great loss to the little Community. Actually the Sisters know not what they owe to his higher ministry in Paradise, and day by day they continue to praise God for the ministrations of Ogden, our First Warden, which are surely going on still.

## A BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The detailed story of the Mother Foundress may be read in *Hannah Grier Coome: A Memoir,* written by one of the early members of the Community, and a brief note must suffice here. Hannah Grier was born on October 28, 1837, being the third daughter and sixth child of the Reverend John Grier and his wife, Eliza Lilias Geddes. Miss Rose Grier, the well-known Principal of the Bishop Strachan School, was an older sister of the Mother Foundress. Her father came from Ireland in 1823, and was ordained deacon and priest at the Cathedral in Quebec. He was S.P.G. Missionary at the Carrying Place, just south of Trenton, from 1824 to 1841, when he was appointed by the Crown as Rector of St. Thomas' Church, Belleville, where he remained until his death in 1871. In 1859, Miss Hannah Grier was married to Mr. Charles H. Coome, a young English engineer who was assisting in the building of the Grand Trunk Railway. Most of their married life was spent in England. Mr. Coome died in August, 1878, in Chicago. She was professed in 1884, governed the Community until her resignation in 1916, and died on February 9, 1921.

# THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEES

## APPOINTED IN 1882 TO SECURE FUNDS FOR THE SUPPORT OF A SISTERHOOD IN CANADA

### THE CANADIAN COMMITTEE:

The Very Rev. the Dean of Ontario, Kingston.
The Rev. A. J. Broughall, Toronto.
The Rev. W. Burke, Belleville.
The Rev. Canon Bleasdell, Trenton.
The Rev. C. J. S. Bethune, M.A., Port Hope.
The Rev. J. D. Cayley, M.A., Toronto.
The Rev. H. W. Davies, D.D., Toronto.
The Rev. Charles Darling, B.A., Toronto.
The Rev. Ogden P. Ford, M.A., Woodbridge.
The Rev. A. J. Fidler, B.A., Whitby.
The Rev. R. Harrison, M.A., Toronto.
The Rev. John Langtry, M.A., Toronto.
The Rev. E. Loucks, Picton.
The Rev. C. H. Mockridge, B.D., Hamilton.
The Rev. A. W. Macnab, M.A., St. Catharines.
The Rev. — Ridley, Tuscarora.
The Rev. C. H. Shortt, B.A., Toronto.
The Rev. R. G. Sutherland, B.A., Hamilton.
The Rev. H. Wilson, D.D., Kingston.
The Rev. J. McLean Ballard, B.A., Toronto.
Dr. J. H. Burns, Toronto.
Mr. H. Brown, C.E., Toronto.
Mr. R. H. Bethune, Toronto.
Mr. G. S. Bethune, Toronto.
Mr. H. Bovell, Toronto.
Mr. John Carter, Toronto.
Mr. John R. Cartwright, Toronto.
Mr. C. J. Campbell, Toronto.
Mr. S. B. Harman, Toronto.
Mr. A. MacLean Howard, Toronto.
Mr. Elmes Henderson, Toronto.
Mr. John C. Kemp, Toronto.
Dr. W. J. Johnson, Toronto.
Dr. E. H. Kertland, Toronto.
Mr. J. H. Plummer, Bay City, Mich.
Mr. A. P. Poussette, Peterborough.
Mr. Alex. Marling, Toronto.
Mr. W. T. O'Reilly, Toronto.
Mr. W. Sutherland Taylor, Toronto.
Dr. Ridley, Hamilton.
Mrs. Broughall, Toronto.
Mrs. Barwick, Toronto.
Mrs. J. R. Cartwright, Toronto.
Mrs. H. Bovell, Toronto.
Mrs. Wm. Baldwin, Toronto.
Mrs. W. Wilcocks Baldwin, Toronto.
Mrs. J. D. Cayley, Toronto.
Mrs. H. W. Davies, Toronto.
Mrs. R. Harrison, Toronto.
Mrs. A. MacLean Howard, Toronto.
Mrs. Richard Miller, St. Catharines.
Mrs. Morgan, Toronto.
Mrs. J. C. Kemp, Toronto.
Mrs. W. T. O'Reilly, Toronto.
Mrs. Christopher Robinson, Toronto.
Mrs. W. Sutherland Taylor, Toronto.
Miss Boulton, Toronto.
Miss Featherstonhaugh, Toronto.
Miss Goldie, Toronto.
Miss Maynard, Toronto.
Miss Strachan, Toronto.
Miss Storey, Toronto.

Convener of General Committee—Mr. John C. Kemp.
Treasurer—Mr. John Carter.
Secretary—Mr. A. Marling.
Convener of Ladies' Sub-Committee—Mrs. Broughall.
Trustees of Building and Endowment Fund—
Mr. John Carter, Toronto.
Mr. R. H. Bethune, Cashier, Dominion Bank, Toronto.
Mr. John C. Kemp, Manager, Canadian Bank of Commerce, Toronto.

### THE ENGLISH COMMITTEE:

#### *Clergy*

The Rev. Robert Gregory, Canon of St. Paul's (afterwards Dean of St. Paul's).
The Rev. H. P. Liddon, D.D., Canon of St. Paul's.
The Rev. Edward King, Canon of Christ Church and Professor of Pastoral Theology in the University of Oxford (afterwards the famous Bishop of Lincoln).
The Rev. C. W. Furse, Hon. Canon of Christ Church, Vicar of Cuddesdon, and Principal of Cuddesdon Theological College.
The Rev. T. T. Carter, Hon. Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, and Warden of the House of Mercy, Clewer.
The Rev. R. C. Kirkpatrick, Vicar of St. Augustine's, Kilburn.
The Rev. C. E. Brooke, Vicar of St. John the Divine, Kennington.
The Rev. George Greenwood, Warden of the Guild of St. Luke, and Chaplain of the Guild of All Saints, Margaret Street.

#### *Laymen*

The Right Honourable Lord Forbes.
The Honourable Charles L. Wood (the late Lord Halifax).
Alfred Meadows, Esquire, M.D., Physician to St. Mary's Hospital.
John Walter Lea, Esquire.
Dr. Meymott Tidy, Professor of Chemistry, etc., at the London Hospital.
Henry O. Wakeman, Esquire, Bursar of Keble College, Oxford.
Henry Wagner, Esquire.

## THE DEDICATION OF THE COMMUNITY

While the fundamental principles of the Religious state are common to all Communities, yet the special dedication chosen by each one will usually suggest some characteristic which is intended to be pre-eminent in its life. Thus a "Society of the Holy Childhood" might be expected to devote itself to the care of children; an "Order of Saint Francis" to emphasize the vow of poverty; a "Brotherhood of the Sacred Passion" to live a life of reparation.

In the case of this Sisterhood the dedication is to Saint John the Divine. What was the reason for the choice, and what the significance?

The reason was a natural and very human one. During the married life of the Mother Foundress in London, England, she had been in the habit of attending the Church of St. John the Divine, Kennington. There she had forged very close friendships and associations. When the new foundation for Canada was planned it was not surprising that she desired to use the name of the parish which had meant so much to her spiritual life, and to have as its patron the Apostle who had been so near to our Lord.

For a time, however, the choice of the dedication hung in the balance. A group of nurses, not bound by any vows but associated for mutual benefit, had used this name and had been in great financial difficulties, and it was felt that it might be unwise to adopt the same name. As an alternative title, "The Sisters of St. Faith" (in honour of our Holy Religion, not of the saint commemorated on October 6th), was approved, but happily the nurses disbanded in time for the Sisters to assume the name which has grown dear to so many.

The significance of the dedication is twofold:

(1) "The Sisters of Saint John the Divine are dedicated to the undivided service of Jesus Christ, after the example of the Beloved Disciple whose name they bear, for the fulfilment of the two-fold law of charity. Like Saint John, they are called to find their joy in fellowship with their Lord, and for this end to forsake all worldly distractions. Like him, they must receive from their Lord all whom He commits to their care, to tend in His Name and for His sake." So runs the opening article of the Community Statutes. One word will sum it up—the word "Love"—the love for God and love for mankind which was the refrain of all the teaching of the Apostle of Love.*

(2) It is to be noticed that the dedication is to Saint John the *Divine*, not to Saint John the Evangelist, though they were one and the same Apostle, and herein lies the second significance. The characteristic of the Patron's life which the Community emphasizes is not so much his work of teaching and preaching the Gospel as his work of contemplation. Like the eagle, which is his emblem and theirs, the Sisters are to strive in their spiritual lives to soar up, and to gaze steadily into the Face of God, the Sun of Righteousness.

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* I S. John V. 1-3; S. John XIII. 34.

## GROWTH AND EXPANSION 1884-1946

Although the Sisterhood of St. John the Divine actually came into being on the Festival of the Nativity, B.V.M., the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross—September 14th, 1884, was an auspicious day for the beginning of its corporate life. Was it not dedicated in honour of the Apostle who had stood beside the Cross of Christ? And did it not fulfil, in anticipation at least, the definition of a Religious Order as given in 1930 by the Bishops at Lambeth:—"A body of devout* persons who have given their lives in complete sacrifice as a supreme act of worship to God and for His immediate service?"

The "devout persons" who met in the plain little house on Robinson Street, with its four chairs which had to be moved from room to room wherever they were needed, were the Mother Foundress and one Novice who had had a short training at Peekskill. Shortly afterwards they were joined by the second woman who had been waiting to test her vocation.

The "immediate service" lay all about them in the Parish of St. Matthias, and began on the very first day. Visiting from house to house to find out the needs of the people, soon included the daily carrying of food to the poor and aged. Then came the provision of a dinner twice a week at "St. John's House" (as the early convent was called) for convalescents, who were chiefly young mothers in need of more nourishing food than their homes could supply. There was also much teaching to be done, and the gathering in of more children for St. Matthias' Sunday School. One of the most pressing needs of all, however, was the care of the sick poor, and as the little Community began to cope with it, they realized that it could not be done in the people's own homes. There *must* be a hospital. Nursing must be the first active work of the Sisterhood.

### I. WORKS OF MERCY

Just at this juncture the Synod of Toronto offered to send a party of women to Moose Jaw to nurse the soldiers wounded in the Northwest Rebellion which was then going on. The Government accepted the offer very gratefully upon condition that they were "not amateurs, but trained nurses under one head". The Mother Foundress was asked to undertake the work, and early in 1885 she left for the West with two postulants and three fully trained nurses. They had the distinction of being the first women on official record in Canada to nurse the military, and amongst the treasured possessions of the Sisters to-day is the medal awarded afterwards to the Mother Foundress.

When the little party returned to Toronto towards the end of the summer they found that the benefactors and friends whom they had left behind had not been idle, and that the first Saint John's Hospital was waiting to be occupied. It is true that it was only a small house at the corner of Euclid Avenue and Robinson Street, connected with the Convent (as may be seen in the picture) by a covered passageway, and that it had little in the way of

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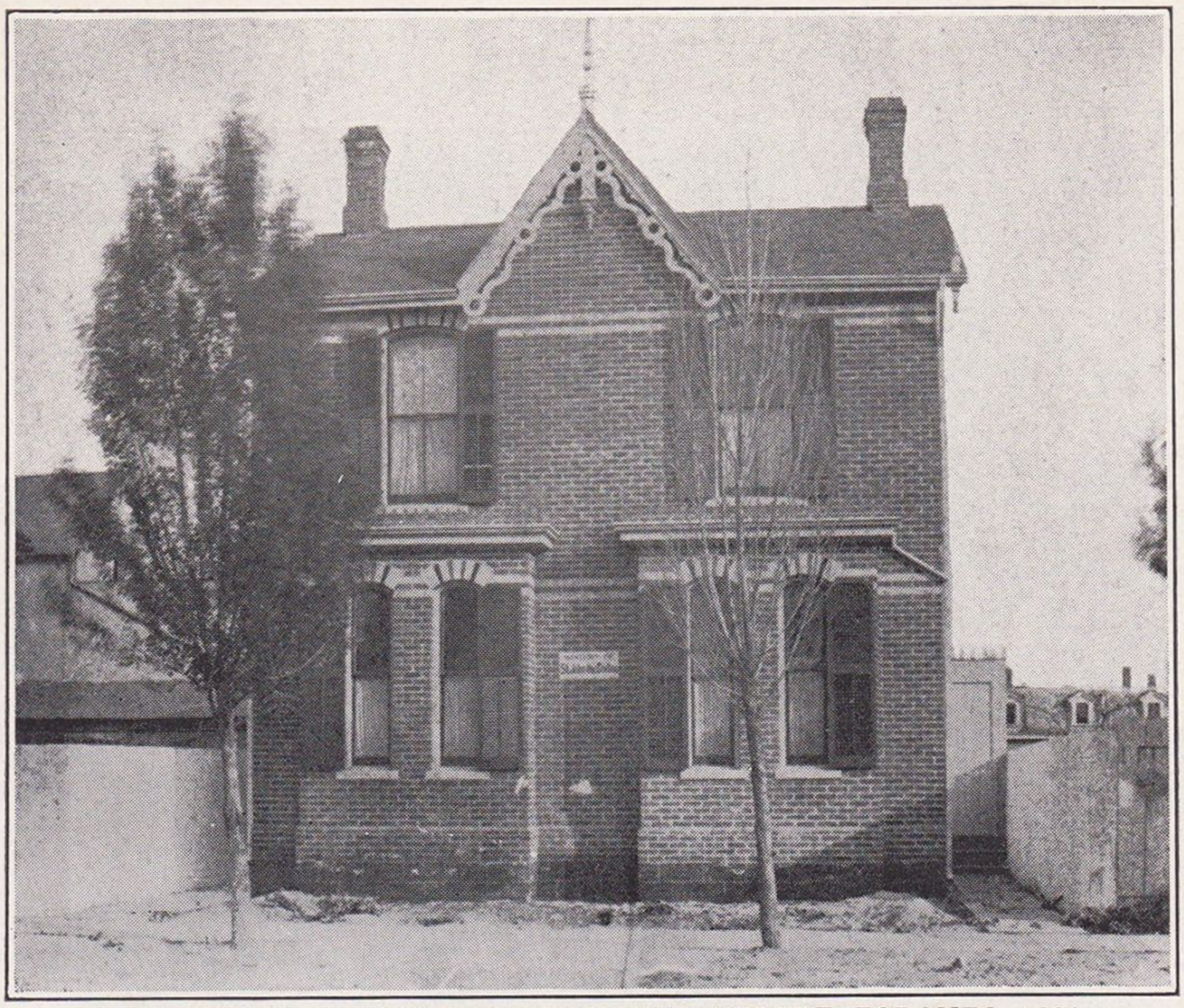
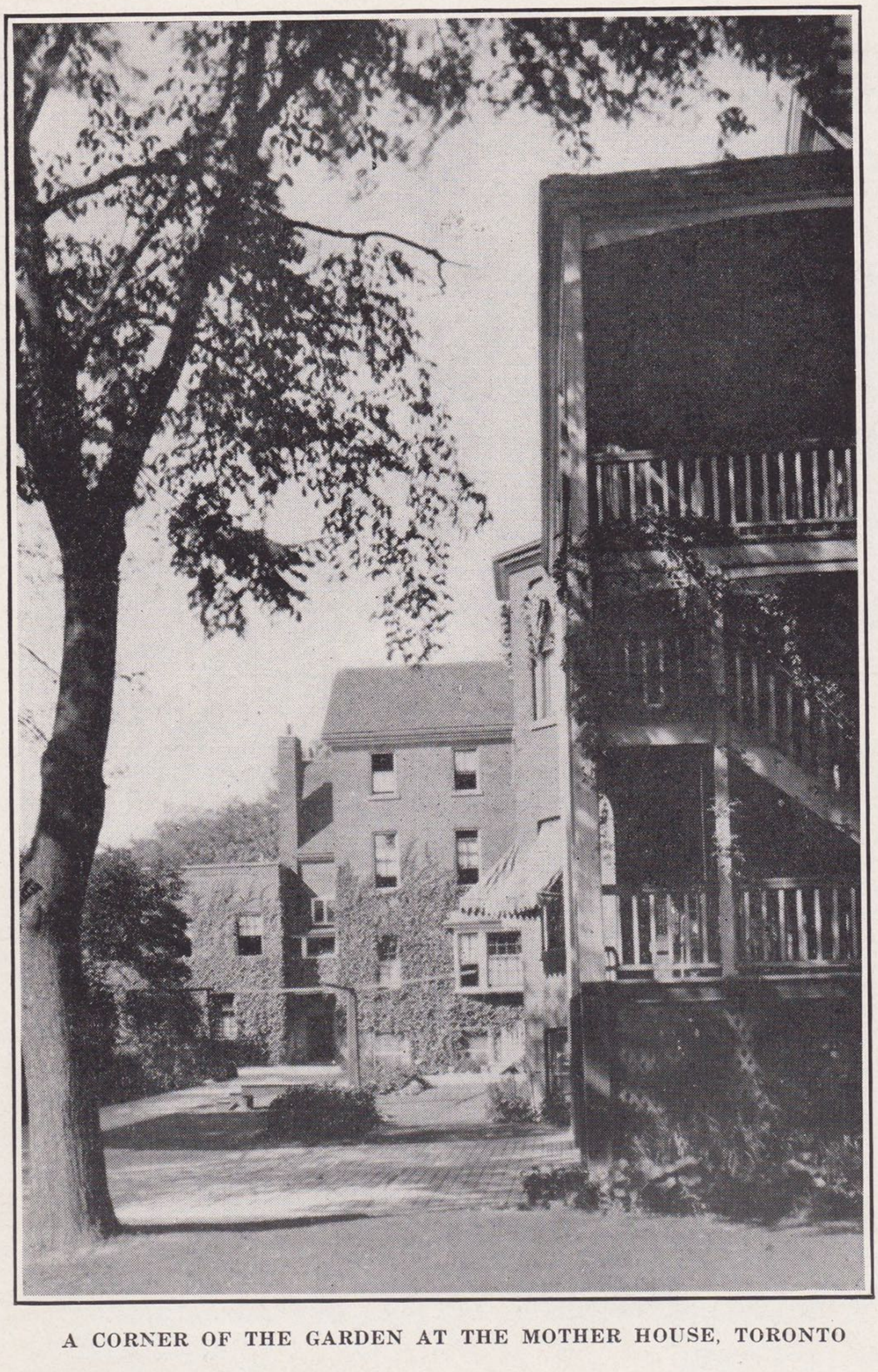
* "Devout" in its correct sense of "devoted", or "given to GOD by pledge or vow".



THE FIRST CONVENT, ON ROBINSON STREET, TORONTO, 1884

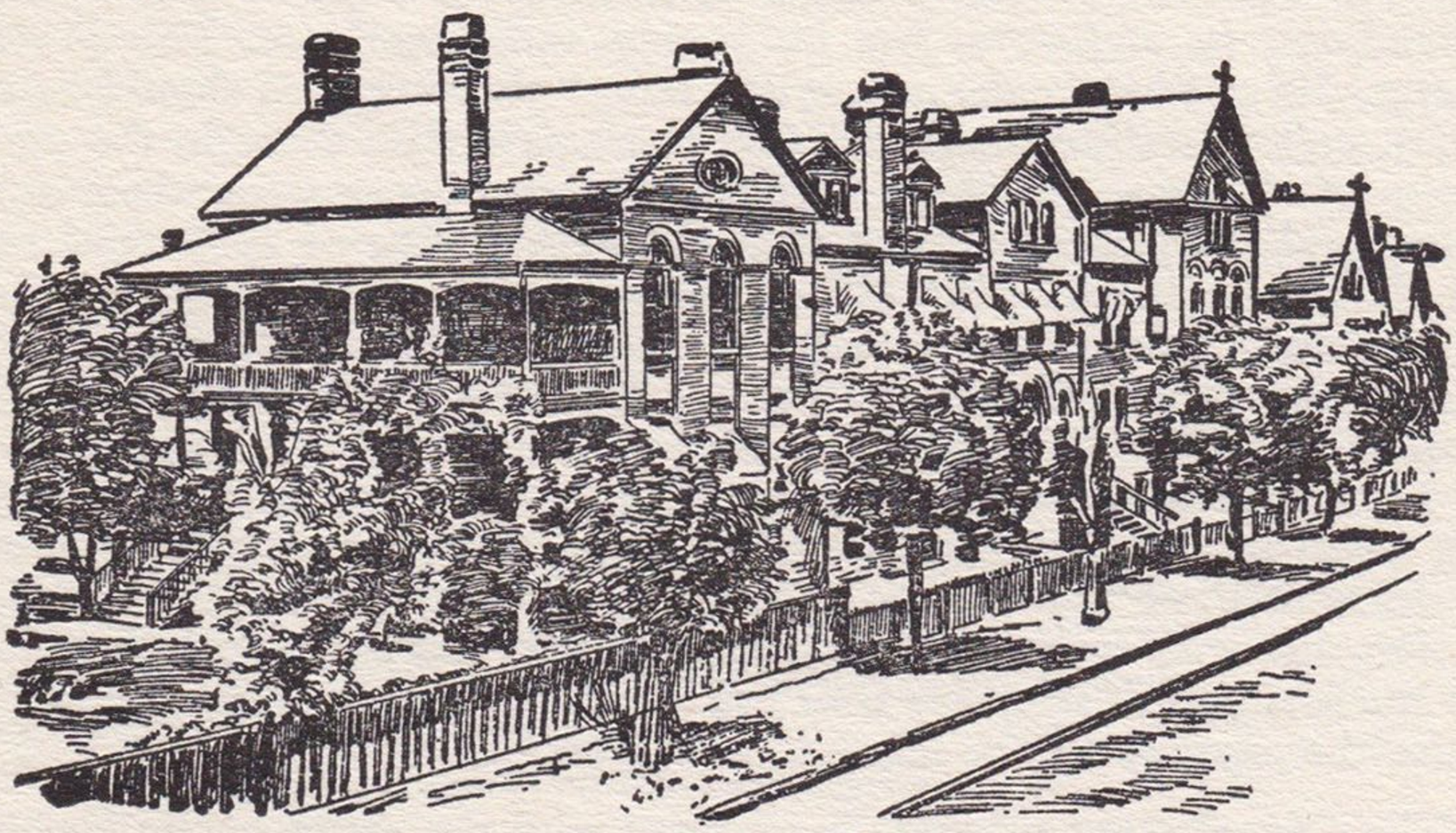
AT THE CHURCH HOME FOR THE AGED, TORONTO



A CORNER OF THE GARDEN AT THE MOTHER HOUSE, TORONTO

surgical equipment, but it had several private rooms for paying patients and a Public Ward with eight beds for those who needed free care. Great was the joy of the Doctors, of the poor and of the Community itself. To the pioneer nursing of soldiers in Canada, the Order was now to add the distinction of opening the first Hospital to specialize in the care of women. By its provision for private patients, it was also to lead the way in dispelling the old-fashioned prejudice against hospitals which was then so prevalent. The "home atmosphere" which was introduced into the little house on Euclid Avenue has always been one of the traditions of the Houses of the Community.

It was not long before the Hospital outgrew its quarters, and a move became necessary, for 465 persons had come under its care during the first three years. Of these 259 had been free patients.



S. JOHN'S HOUSE AND CONVENT ON MAJOR STREET

The friends who had been working so indefatigably now set themselves to raise the money to purchase land and to erect the buildings on Major Street in which the Convent and the Hospital have made their home since 1889. With wise prevision they planned, as they thought, for fifty years of growth and expansion, but the reality exceeded even their highest expectation. In 1893 the present Chapel was erected—because the temporary Chapel in what is now the refectory had grown too small—and behind it a wing with additional rooms for the Sisters. Subsequently, as need arose, houses facing on Brunswick Avenue were otbained, thus forming a little block of land and enclosing a delightful garden, which, as the years go on and the neighbourhood becomes more and more "down town", gives to our Mother House the feeling of a veritable oasis.

In the early days the Sisters themselves did all the nursing in the Hospital, both by night and by day. Then, as the work increased outside as well as inside its walls, it became necessary to make use of secular help, and finally

to establish the Training School for Nurses, from which it always strove to send out graduates imbued with the highest ideals of their profession.

Friends of the Community in the 1920's and 1930's will remember two Hospital works which had greatly contrasting exterior settings, the Out-Patient Department, held in the basement of the Old Garrison Church (St. John's) on Portland Street, and the House of Rest, a small Convalescent Home, which was carried on for nearly ten years at Mount St. John, Bayview Avenue.

For some time the question of the future of St. John's Hospital was given careful consideration by those concerned. In these days of large hospitals equipped with all the latest and most expensive furnishings and appliances, especially in the realm of surgery, it is difficult for the smaller hospitals to exist, and yet many people prefer a small hospital, with its quiet, home-like surroundings, its enclosure, and its greater individual care. This preference, however, did not justify the asking any longer that surgeons should be willing to work under conditions so much less convenient than those in the operating theatres of the large hospitals, and rather than impose upon their unfailing courtesy and co-operation it was decided in the Spring of 1937 that the Hospital should be closed. This did not, however, break the continuity of the first work of mercy undertaken by the Community, namely the care of the sick, for already St. John's Convalescent Hospital at Newtonbrook had been formally opened by His Excellency Baron Tweedsmuir. The Hospital is built on a beautiful site consisting of twenty-five acres of land and is situated four miles north of the city limits. Funds for the project were raised, under the able leadership of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey, by public subscription, and with assistance from the Provincial and Municipal Governments. Only the first unit of sixty-five beds has been built to date (1946). It is planned to raise the capacity to one hundred and fifty.

The Convalescent Hospital is affiliated with the seven public hospitals of Toronto. Each of these appoints two or more members of its staff who take duty in rotation: thus insuring medical supervision throughout the period of convalescence. In modern convalescent care a staff of professional workers is required in order to provide the various therapies—physiotherapy, occupational therapy—dietary, recreational and nursing care.

The Sisters have associated with them on the Board of Directors men and women who give generously of their time and experience and who share the financial and legal responsibilities of this work.

After nine years of experience it is felt that this type of service to the sick is essentially a work for Sisters, with the many opportunities it offers, not only to build up healthy bodies, but also to restore sick minds and broken spirits.

Nor has the Community ceased to participate in ordinary Hospital work. In October, 1936, three members of the Sisterhood were sent in response to the request of the Bishop of Nova Scotia to take the direction of All Saints' Hospital, Springhill. This hospital, founded in 1893 by Canon Wilson, and

possessing a small endowment, belongs to the Anglican Church, but ministers to the public of a mining town and the surrounding district, which includes many lumber camps and two small sea-ports. Besides every variety of work in this general hospital of fifty-four beds, the Sisters aid in some parochial work.

The buildings have long been inadequate, and it is hoped that the municipality of Springhill will soon assume the responsibility of providing general care for the needy. It is the Bishop's intention that the Corporation of All Saints' Hospital, with the Sisters, will continue to serve within the Diocese of Nova Scotia in a more specific field of nursing.

The second important work undertaken by the Community, for we must go back now to 1887, was the Church Home. The work of the Sisters had revealed the need of the aged and friendless, not only amongst the poor, but also amongst those who due to various circumstances were forced to give up their own homes, or who could not be looked after by relatives. To meet this need a house was taken on Larch Street for the care of twenty men and women. Within six years of the opening, the demand for rooms necessitated the taking of a larger house on John Street and twelve years later this had to be replaced by Bellevue House, near St. Stephen's Church. In 1907 Sir Edmund and Lady Osler added a wing in memory of their daughter-in-law. Though there are now rooms for forty-three old ladies, there are daily requests for accommodation.

The residents of the Church Home are cared for spiritually and physically. The centre of the Home is, of course, the Chapel, where services are held daily, and the Holy Communion is celebrated twice a week. This is a great blessing to the old people who can no longer go out. In special seasons, such as Lent, a priest gives a weekly address in Chapel.

Neither time nor care is spared in planning and providing for the material comfort of the old people. Each room is a "home" and each person is an individual; that is, the Church Home is a home in the true sense of the word. Musical evenings and entertainments are provided by visiting groups of people and the Christmas Party and other holiday events are eagerly anticipated. During the summer months the garden is a joy to behold, and there is an annual Garden Party to which the old ladies invite their friends and relatives.

A similar work is being carried on in the old hospital buildings on Major Street and Brunswick Avenue, Toronto, which within a few days of the departure of the last patient were re-opened as St. John's House, and St. John's Guest House and quickly filled with elderly ladies. The need for this work of mercy is very evident. Another way in which the Mother House fulfills the monastic tradition of giving shelter to the shelterless is the provision of accommodation for transient and permanent guests in houses on Brunswick Avenue. These Associates, business and professional women, university students, and others, make use of the Sisters' Chapel to a greater or lesser degree, but even those who do

not, speak appreciatively of the joy and peace which they find while living in the Convent guest houses.

The Mission work which began in the Robinson Street days was continued in the Mission House at Seaton Village from 1891 to 1916, and was followed by several years of similar work in All Hallows' Mission House. For some time the Community provided shelter for evicted families in a house on Brunswick Avenue.

Wherever the Sisters may be the unfortunate and needy turn to them, no matter what type of work they do officially, but today Mission work is definitely carried on in two centres. St. Michael's Mission, Montreal, is maintained by the Parish of St. John the Evangelist, and two or three Sisters have been working there since 1929. This House, by the fact that its situation is in one of the city's worst and dirtiest districts, seems to do special honour to the holy Incarnation. Here are carried on Mothers' Meetings, Baptism and Confirmation classes, Scripture and handicraft classes for boys and girls, Sunday morning breakfasts, and many individual works of mercy.

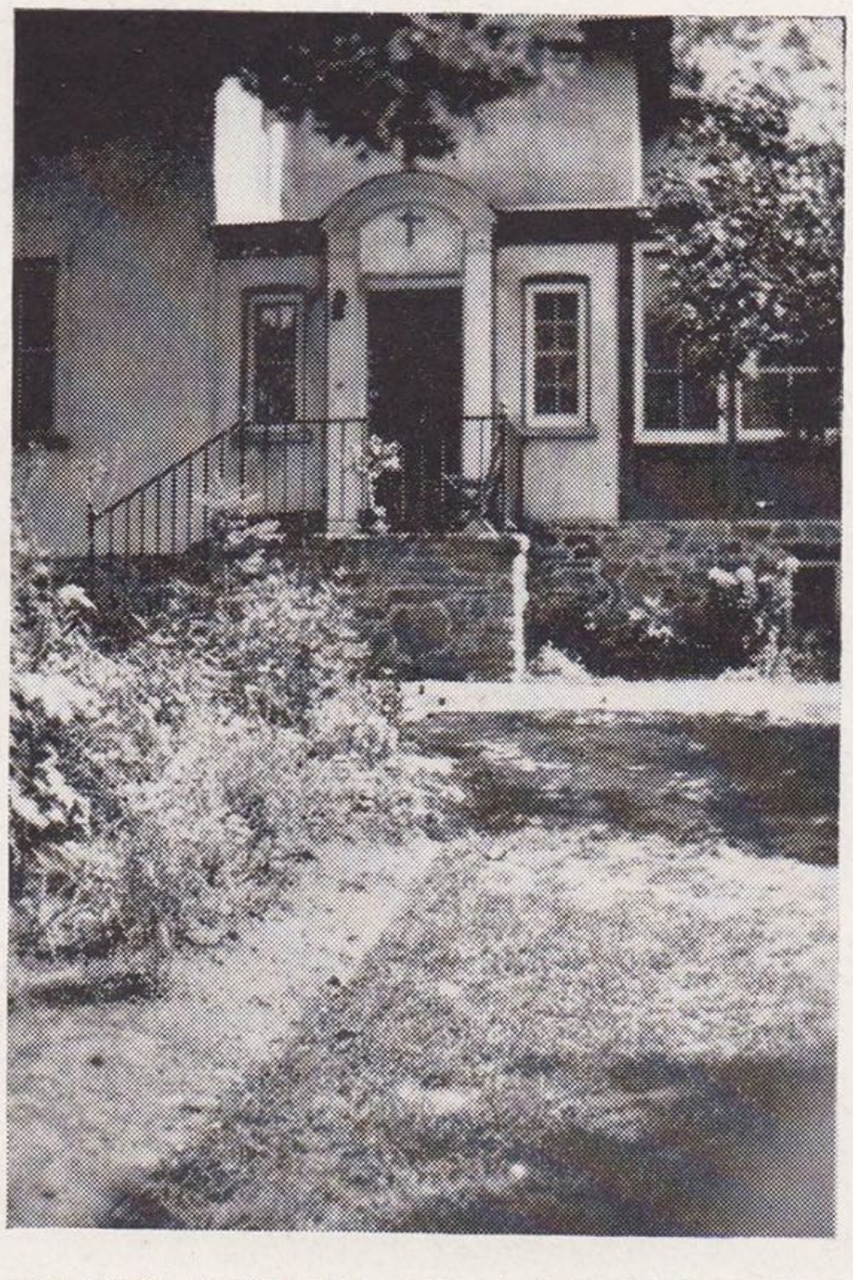
Upon the withdrawal of the Sisters of St. Margaret in 1944 the Sisters of St. John the Divine were asked to take over their Mission work in Muskoka, and St. John's Convent, Bracebridge, is the centre for work among some of the farmers and other settlers of these parts, of whose poverty and need most of the tourists who throng this beautiful and rocky district are unaware. Infant mortality, for instance, has been very great, owing to ignorance and unhygienic conditions; isolation is another grave difficulty. The Community hopes to bring help in many ways to these brave and independent folk.

In 1936 three Sisters began work under the Bishop of Edmonton and opened St. John's House, Edmonton, to shelter the needy. For several years their chief work has been the care of unmarried mothers. In 1946, upon the foundation of Elizabeth House in another diocesan building upon the same property, by a group of Church people, the Sisters extended their ministry to include this home for elderly ladies.

## II. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the beginning of the Community life the Mother Foundress had hoped to take up educational work, but it proved to be only the third important line of development which presented itself. In 1892 the Community was asked to take over the charge of a boarding school for girls in Oshawa, which was in great financial difficulties. There was imminent danger of its being lost to the Church, and although the works in hand were already taxing the resources of the Community almost to their limit, the Mother Foundress felt that she must make the effort to provide Sisters, if those who were interesting themselves in the matter could secure the funds to purchase the property. This was done successfully, and from February, 1893, until June, 1932, Bishop Bethune College was under the Sisters' care. The original house, situated in large and

ST. JOHN'S CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL



ST. JOHN'S CONVENT, BRACEBRIDGE, ONTARIO,

CHRISTMAS TABLEAU, QU'APPELLE DIOCESAN SCHOOL, REGINA

beautiful grounds, was enlarged in various ways, and in 1929 another fine property across the road was purchased to provide for the Junior School. With the two buildings, there was then comfortable accommodation for seventy-five boarding pupils. Unfortunately the period of world financial depression followed close upon this expansion; smaller private schools were among the first types of institution unable to weather the storm, and the School was closed in the summer of 1932.

During several years an Elementary School for boys and girls was carried on by the Sisters in Toronto, but owing to the changing conditions of the neighbourhood surrounding the Convent, it had to be given up.

For the first period of its existence the Community followed the wise policy of building solid foundations. Its members were being trained in the fundamental principles of the Religious Life; its Branch Houses were establishing strong traditions and high ideals; its teaching and practice were being based upon the essentials of the Catholic Faith as they are set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. The result was the winning of confidence from those in authority in the Church, and the coming of many appeals for the work of the Sisters farther afield. It was not until thirty-four years after its foundation, however, that the Community felt justified in launching out from the neighbourhood of Toronto, where the work had grown so quietly and steadily that it had required all their resources to carry it on.

In 1918, responding to a request from the Synod of Qu'Appelle, Sisters were sent to establish and take charge of a Diocesan School. The Qu'Appelle Diocesan School, Regina, is under control of the Synod, but is administered by the Sisterhood; both Sisters and secular mistresses are on the staff, and the Headmistress has at times been a Sister, and at other times a secular. The fortunes and outward organization of the School have been as varied as the wheat crop, but it has survived long periods of drought and depression. While tradition in outward things cannot easily be established in a school in a missionary district so affected by varying economic circumstances, the emphasis on religious teaching has never changed, and graduates of the School are now bearing witness in widely scattered spheres to the value of a training in which religion and the things of the Spirit are brought to bear on life in all its aspects.

Another branch of religious education undertaken by the Community is the Sunday School By Post. This work, started by Miss Aylmer Bosanquet and Miss Margaret West in the Diocese of Qu'Appelle, working in conjunction with the Sunday School Vans, has been carried on by two or three Sisters, under the Diocesan Board of Religious Education, either within the walls of the School or in a small house nearby. In 1939 the Sisters were given full charge of this ministry to over three thousand pupils, and they have formed links with them not only by the printed lessons and by personal letters, but also by the radio services broadcast in the different Anglican churches of Regina.

In 1935 the Sisters were asked by the Bishop of Algoma to undertake the Sunday School By Post work in that Diocese in co-operation with the Cowley Fathers of Bracebridge, and for eleven years this work has been carried on by one or more Sisters from the Convent in Toronto. Lately the work has been extended to take in more pupils from other districts, whose lessons are being sent and corrected by Sisters in the Convent at Bracebridge.

The Community has done Sunday School work in Toronto from the earliest days, sometimes with classes in as many as seventeen parishes, and one or more Sisters go out to teach in Sunday School from nearly every Branch House where they work. At one time Teacher Training Classes met at the Convent in Toronto for any who desired to fit themselves more fully for this work, but were discontinued when such classes were provided for on a larger scale by the deaneries of the city.

All members of the Community during their Novitiate are given training in such subjects as Holy Scripture, Church Doctrine, and the principles of the Religious Life. Some have also taken the course prescribed for the Archbishop of Canterbury's examination, and in 1927 three Sisters, who had completed it, obtained the Lambeth Diploma, and hold the Archbishop's License to teach Theology.

To come back, however, to the growth of the educational works:—In 1927 the Community was asked by the Child Welfare Council of Canada to undertake an experiment in the care of underprivileged children, in order that the possibilities of training and the need for proper provision might be demonstrated. It was felt that the special qualifications needed for such work should be found in Sisters. Several members of the Community were accordingly given the other training necessary, and for nearly twenty years Sisters have taken charge of the family of children, averaging sixteen in number, and with an average *mental* age of eight, though their years vary from seven to the twenties, who comprise the household of Shernfold School, Ottawa. *

Most of these children remain in the care of the School for all or part of the summer holidays and since 1933 they have spent the weeks from the end of June until early September at Camp Haydon, a summer home purchased for them on Christy's Lake near Perth, Ontario. Here ordinary school routine is abandoned and they are able to enter quite fully into many normal camp pastimes; particularly do they delight in the daily time for bathing in the lake, and a number of them have learned to swim.

A similar type of work to that at Ottawa is being carried on at St. John's-on-the-Hill, a Dairy Farm situated one and a quarter miles north of Aurora, where, in beautiful surroundings, there is a large house with accommodation for fourteen mentally defective children. The needs of these are met individually, with a view to developing each to the best of which she is capable. They stay indefinitely, as this is not a school, but a home for

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* In November, 1946, as this goes to press, it has been decided to withdraw from this work in June, 1947, due to the shortage of younger Sisters with the special aptitude and training required.

children who cannot live in their own homes because of other children in the family, or similar difficulties.

In the years 1930-1938 the Community carried on a happy work at St. Christina School, Cooperstown, N.Y., and from 1927-1941 at Bishop Mountain Hall, in Quebec City. The latter was an orphanage and also a hostel for High School girls.

World War II offered two opportunities of service which might be classed as educational work. In its early days the Reverend Mother was asked to organize a "Call to Prayer" to the women of Canada, irrespective of denomination, and out of this movement grew the "Schools of Prayer" held in Toronto and elsewhere.

From 1943 to 1946, under the Archbishop of Kootenay, special work was done at Vernon, B.C., in helping the Church to meet conditions created by the war and by the large military training centre there.

The subject of Religious Education is a very far-reaching one, for it includes not only such works as we have described, but also the innumerable opportunities which come in the way of preparing candidates for the Sacraments of the Church; giving courses of instruction at a Summer School or Conference; holding Bible or Study Classes; suggesting courses of reading; to say nothing of the channel which "S. John's Messenger", the Community Magazine, affords as a medium for the teaching of the Faith.

## III. OTHER DEPARTMENTS OF WORK

First there is the Church Embroidery Room, which traces its history back to the early days on Robinson Street. We realize that the Mother Foundress lost no time in its establishment, for the semi-weekly dinners for convalescents were held in the "room used for sewing and embroidery". The talent and training which she herself brought to this work set a very high standard which the Community has been trying ever since to maintain. In the beginning much voluntary assistance was given by Associates and others who were skilled needlewomen, but of late years it has been found better to have it done only by the Sisters and a small staff of paid helpers. Vestments, Altar linen, and every form of embroidery done in the Church Work Room, are being used in the worship of God not only in Canada, but in many parts of the United States, and in England.

The Altar Bread Room is another department which is doing its share to aid in the reverent offering of the Holy Eucharist. It has been very interesting to watch the growth of this work. Each annual report shows a notable increase in the figures given and many hundreds of thousands of Wafers and of Priest's Hosts are sent out every year.

Parochial Work has always taken a large share of the time of the Community. The charge of Mother's Meetings, branches of the Mother's Union and other Societies, the visiting of Sunday School children in their

homes, the supervision of Altar Guilds, and requests for Sisters to address meetings of various kinds, take them into many parishes in Toronto and in the places where Branch Houses are established.

One type of work that grows steadily and for which the Community hopes to see an ever-growing demand is connected with Retreats. Quiet Afternoons and Evenings are held in the Convent Chapel from time to time, and rarely a month passes without a request from someone to visit the Convent for a private retreat. The Sisters try always to have rooms available for these retreatants and hope that some day it may be possible for them to provide a permanent Retreat House for individuals and groups seeking Quiet in this way. Sisters are called upon to conduct Quiet Hours or Days of Retreat both in the city and in places further afield, and are always glad to respond to any such opportunity.

## SUPERIORS

Sister Hannah, S.S.J.D., Mother Foundress 1884-1916

Sister Dora, S.S.J.D. - - - - - - - - 1916-1945

Sister Aquila, S.S.J.D. - - - - - - - - 1945-

## SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS, BENEFACTORS, FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES

In the preceding pages we have told of some of the outstanding lines along which the Community has grown and developed. The spiritual foundation laid by the First Warden, the Reverend Ogden P. Ford, was carried on for many years by Dr. C. J. S. Bethune, then by Father Davenport, who in turn was followed by Dr. Jenks, of the General Theological Seminary, New York. The Most Rev. J. C. Roper, late Archbishop of Ottawa, was the Warden from 1919 until his death in 1940. His association with the Community dates back to 1888 when he succeeded Father Ford in the duties of Chaplain. The present Warden is the Right Reverend G. F. Kingston, Bishop of Nova Scotia, while the Fathers of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, of Bracebridge, minister as Chaplains.

To the three Bishops of Toronto who in turn became the Visitor of the Community—Archbishop Sweatman (1884-1909), Archbishop Sweeny (1909-1932), and the Most Reverend Derwyn T. Owen (1932-)—we owe a deep debt of gratitude. The other diocesan Bishops under whom we have worked elsewhere have also welcomed and helped us as true Fathers in GOD.

As for our benefactors and friends—they are innumerable. The pages of this story tell something of what they have done for us. There is space for only a few names, but some must be placed on record to make the sketch less incom-

THE SISTER DORA, S.S.J.D.
MOTHER SUPERIOR, 1916-1945

THE CHAPEL AT THE MOTHER HOUSE, TORONTO

plete. First, the little body of early friends, including Canon Stewart Darling, of Holy Trinity; Dr. Langtry, of St. Luke's; Mr. John Carter and Mr. Marling; Mrs. A. J. Broughall, who lived until 1928, and saw how God was blessing the early venture of faith; Mrs. MacLean Howard who began the raising of the Endowment Fund, and Mrs. Christopher Robinson who carried it on with such enthusiasm; Mr. J. H. Plummer and Mr. Elmes Henderson, close counsellors and friends of the Mother Foundress; Mr. William Cowan, of Oshawa, who did so much for B.B.C.; Mr. Bigwood, Mr. Stuart Strathy, Mr. Ferrar Davidson and Mr. Dyce Saunders, whose financial and legal advice helped us through many a difficulty; Mrs. Kilgour, Mr. and Mrs. Wickham, Mrs. Chambers and Miss Roper—but we dare not go on, for there is no end to the names we could recall.

Last, but by no means least, we must tell of the great faithful body of Associates, beginning with the priests—about eighty of them now—who by their interest, their prayers, and the offering from time to time of the Holy Sacrifice, have done so much for the Community. These Priests-Associate, ministering in many different places, are one of the mediums through which the Religious Life can be made known and vocations recognized and fostered.

The Lay Associates are women living in their own homes who desire to be linked with the Community—(a) for mutual spiritual help, (b) for promoting the revival of the Religious Life, (c) for assisting the Sisters by their prayers, alms, and good works. They began, like the Community, with two or three; now they number about seven hundred throughout the world, and many in Paradise. It is by the power of their life of prayer that the greatest help has been given, since daily intercession for the Community is an integral part of each Associate's rule, but there are also many opportunities for practical aid to the Convent and its Branch Houses which may be used according to individual means and opportunity.

Retreats and Quiet Days are provided from time to time for the Associates. When these actually began is unknown, but as early as 1892 and 1893 they were being conducted by Father Benson of Cowley, who was then in America, and they have gone on ever since.

The first meeting for organization of the Associates, of which there is any record, was held at St. Stephen's Rectory, Toronto, on November 27th, 1893, when Mrs. Broughall was elected as Convener, and Mrs. Christopher Robinson as Secretary. In course of time Wards were formed in other centres in order that the distant groups of Associates might meet together in fellowship, prayer, and corporate work for the Community. Where Associates are isolated, or too few in number to form a Ward, they keep in direct touch with the Convent through the Sister Warden.

In 1937 the Associates within reach of Toronto began a new venture in the form of a week-end Conference, including a Quiet Day on the Sunday, followed by Round Table discussions on the Monday. This was repeated in 1938 and brought a wider representation of distant Associates. The War

interfered in 1939 with the plans for making the Conferences an annual event, but it is hoped that they may be resumed as soon as conditions permit, for they offer valuable opportunities for mutual help and inspiration.

For the Spiritual Directors, Benefactors, Friends and Associates of the past and the present, and for all that they have done, the Community is grateful to GOD. It thanks Him, too, for the promise of the future, as a new generation is rising up to carry on the work laid down by the faithful pioneers.

## THE SPIRIT AND SCOPE OF THE COMMUNITY

*"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it"*—This has been the motto of the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine since its foundation. The words are those of Our Lady, but they embody the spirit of Saint John as well.

It is not hard to imagine what prompted the choice of the motto for the little band of women setting out in 1884 on their great adventure for GOD. When the Mother Foundress was trained by the Sisters of Saint Mary, what was more natural than for her to become steeped in the spirit of the Blessed Virgin? What was more natural in *any* case than to have a great devotion to the Mother who was committed from the Cross to the care of the Beloved Apostle, and to cherish her few recorded sayings? And what other motto could have been so suited to all the circumstances of the new Community?

Obedience and Adventure! Both, says the motto, are to be marks of the Sisters—and the Sisterhood—of Saint John the Divine.

That does not mean for a moment that these marks are peculiar to this Order, nor that we are claiming for its members any high standard of attainment above others. What it means is simply that they supply the key to the history of the development of the Sisterhood, that they have been and are the guiding principles of its life, both corporately and individually.

First—Obedience to lawful authority in the Church. Loyalty to the teaching and practice of the Anglican Communion as a true part of the Church Catholic. Before the Community was begun, the consent of the Bishop of the Diocese was sought and he was asked to become Visitor. In all the years that have followed, no new work has been undertaken, no radical change made in the Rule of Life or Customary without the knowledge and approval of the Visitor or the Diocesan concerned. This may have seemed at times to retard the development of the Community. As a matter of fact it has strengthened and stabilized it.

Secondly—Adventure! While the Community has held fast to the essential principles of the Religious Life, it has tried to meet each new emergency, to adapt itself to the needs of the age and of the country, in the spirit of Our Lord Himself. Did He not break through many of the traditions which had grown up in Israel? Did He not pause in a journey of great importance to perform an act of mercy to a poor woman or a blind man? Did he not surprise

the guests at Cana and give the servants a thrill of adventure when He performed His first miracle with their co-operation?

For more than sixty years now He has been making His will known to the Community—sometimes as a Voice in the silence, sometimes in an unfolding vision of His purpose, sometimes in the guidance of spiritual directors, sometimes in the conjunction of circumstances, and, though there have been failures at times through human frailty, the Sisters have striven to follow what He has made manifest, to co-operate with His Divine purpose.

In the early days of the foundation it seemed as though the vocation of the Community, as the first native Order in the Dominion, were to the service of the Church in Canada. The country and its needs were so vast, the workers so few. It is still felt that, so far as active works are concerned, Canada is the vineyard in which the Sisters are called to labour chiefly; but GOD has twice made known His will that for a while they should work in the United States, and they went adventuring there. It may be that some day He may call them to a House in the foreign mission field, they have often discussed the possibility and the preparation needed, and if He does, they trust they may be found ready. They exist to be used, as GOD wills, in the service of the *whole* Church—not for any *one* country, or diocese, or party, or section of it.

The scope of the work of the Community is bounded only by "the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that a woman may perform." But even though the "corporal works" lie mainly in Canada, the "spiritual work", the Apostolate of Prayer, is world-wide, or more truly, may we say that it is wide as the Catholic Church, for it reaches out in the Church Expectant and Triumphant as well as in the Church Militant here on earth.

It is good to realize that besides the growth within the Community itself, both in its numbers and in its active work, there has been much growth outside in the breaking down of old prejudices, and in the dissemination throughout Canada of wider knowledge of the principles of the Religious Life. It may be that people yet are too apt to value Religious Orders more for the sake of their works than for the sake of their life. But at any rate they are learning that *Sisters are for the Church,* and *not the Church for Sisters.* For the Church —primarily by giving their lives in *complete Sacrifice* to GOD, that He may use them in whatever way He wills, whether it be in the hidden life of prayer or in outward works of mercy, whether amid the beauty of a worship expressed in glorious ceremonial, or in the teaching of the Faith in the poverty of a bare little mission Chapel.

As the readers hear of the Sisters, will they sometimes offer on their behalf this Community prayer:—

> O Almighty GOD, defend we beseech Thee, and rule by Thy Holy Spirit, Thy servants the Sisters of Saint John the Divine. Fill their hearts with love to Thee and to one another, and charity towards all men. Give them all they need for soul and body. Add to their numbers and bless their work. Keep them as wise virgins, faithful, humble, and obedient, ever serving Thee meekly with pure hearts, in the spirit of poverty and peace. Reveal Thyself to them ever more and more. Draw them from earthly things to give them rest and joy in Thee, and make this Society to please Thee and to tarry till the Master come. Amen.

## Form of Bequest

I give the sum of dollars (free from all succession duties) to the Sisterhood of Saint John the Divine (Incorporated), Toronto, to be used as the Board of Directors of the Sisterhood shall see fit, and I declare that the receipt of the Superior and of the Bursar shall be a full discharge to my executors in respect of this legacy.

Authorized as second class mail, Post Office Department, Ottawa.

# Directory

**THE REVEREND MOTHER SUPERIOR, S.S.J.D.**
St. John's Convent, Toronto, Ontario.

**THE WARDEN OF ASSOCIATES**
28 Major Street, Toronto

**THE CHURCH WORKROOM**
St. John's Convent, Major Street, Toronto

**THE ALTAR BREAD DEPARTMENT**
St. John's Convent, Major Street, Toronto

**ST. JOHN'S HOUSE**
28 Major Street, Toronto

**GUEST HOUSES**
33-35, 39-41, 45, and 49 Brunswick Avenue, Toronto

**THE CHURCH HOME FOR THE AGED**
78 Oxford Street and 87 Bellevue Avenue, Toronto

**ST. JOHN'S CONVALESCENT HOSPITAL**
Cummer Avenue, Newtonbrook, Ontario

**ALL SAINTS' HOSPITAL**
Springhill, Nova Scotia

**ST. JOHN'S-ON-THE-HILL**
R.R. No. II, Aurora, Ontario

**SHERNFOLD SCHOOL**
72 Bronson Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario

**QU'APPELLE DIOCESAN SCHOOL**
College Avenue, Regina, Saskatchewan

**ST. CHRISTOPHER'S HOUSE**
(Sunday School by Post)
1601 College Avenue
Regina, Saskatchewan

**ST. MICHAEL'S MISSION**
181 Dorchester Street West, Montreal, P.Q.

**ST. JOHN'S HOUSE**
11714, 92nd Street, Edmonton, Alberta

**ST. JOHN'S CONVENT**
Bracebridge, Ontario

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